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AUTHOR Ashton, Patricia
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ABSTRACT

Those concerned about promoting children's academic achievement must first be concerned about insuring all children the right to adequate food, shelter, security, and love. When these elemental needs have been met, students are then free to respond to their need to know and understand. If schools can respond to children's needs to belong, to be appreciated and valued, to acquire meaningful skills, to contribute to important human endeavors--then the eighties will be a decade of significant educational progress. Major efforts needed to achieve these goals include: (1) school programs aimed at the development of social responsibility: (2) specifications of long range educational goals and development of appropriate instruments for evaluation of goal attainment: (3) curriculum materials that are developmentally appropriate: (4) development of effective teacher-student relationships: (5) research aimed at solving school problems: and (6) professional education of teachers. (CJ)

Strategies for Educational Progress in the Eighties

Patr ia Ashton

Foundations of Education

University of Florida

Gainesville, Florida

(568)

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In Schools for the 70's and Beyond: A Call for Action, the staff of the National Education Association proposed that the major goal of the seventies should be "making the schools humane institutions." As the end of the seventies approaches, an assessment of the extent to which the NEA objective has been met gives needed perspective for identifying goals for the schools of the eighties. According to the NEA report, a humane school is

> . . . one that celebrates personal differences and, also emphasizes human commonalities; helps the student to understand his antecedents, to grow from them, and finally, to not be restricted by them; encourages superior scholarship which allows the inquirer to contribute to his society and to strengthen his own personality; provides the resources for the individual to examine his own life so that he can enlarge his maturity and help to cause growth in others (p. 20).

Consideration of current conditions in schools reveals that little progress was made in humanizing the schools in the seventies. The major concern of parents continues to be the schools' lack of discipline (Gallup, 1979); thousands of teachers are physically assaulted by their students each year; student violence and vandalism are rampant (Van Patten, 1977); the Supreme Court has reaffirmed the use of corporal punishment as a legitimate means of social control in the schools (Englander, 1978), and student and teacher competence are continually questioned (Gallup, 1979).

Education for Social Responsibility

While many educational theorists and practitioners have emphasized that children's social development is a primary responsibility of the schools, an honest evaluation of schools' efforts in facilitating social development reveals very little concerted effort toward this objective. Significant advances in social justice, specifically integration and mainstreaming, have required legal mandates. For the most part, educators have failed to respond to the challenge of providing learning environments that encourage the development of cooperation and social understanding. Research in contempora classrooms dramatically reveals that the structure of current school systems tends to reinforce group stereotypes and polarities rather than foster integration and understanding.

A number of studies of the effects of integration on social relations clearly indicate that integration of diverse racial groups does not necessarily result in increased interracial acceptance and interaction and may even have a detrimental effect (Schofield, 1978). Similarly, research has repeatedly shown that handicapped children placed in regular classrooms tend to be rejected by their non-handicapped peers (Bryan, 1976; Jones, 1978). Some reports of mainstreaming of handicapped children suggest that the non-handicapped group may even become more negative toward the handicapped students as a result of mainstreaming (Bryan, Wheeler, Felcan, & Henek, 1976). Thus, racial integration and mainstreaming of handicapped children may increase these children's sense of social isolation and rejection, unless specific efforts to facilitate their acceptance into the classroom are initiated.

Conditions identified as essential for improving intergroup acceptance include

> . . . equal status contact between majority and minority groups. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports. . . and provided it . . . leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups (Allport, 1954, p. 281).

Thus, in order to provide opportunities for the facilitation of intergroup acceptance, schools must eliminate, as much as possible, institutional support of status distinctions between different groups.

One particularly deleterious practice that maintains and supports unequal status is ability grouping (Schofield, 1979). Research has consistently demonstrated the negative effects of grouping children according to their ability, yet many teachers and administrators continue to favor this practice (Wilson & Schmits, 1978).

If schools are to be successful in fostering intergroup relations, opportunities for all groups of students to participate in the decision making that influences the school are vital; by forming cross-role decision-making groups (that is, groups comprised of students, teachers, administrators and other key school and community members) with legitimate authority to decide on innovations in curriculum, educational resources, school policies, etc., students could obtain a sense of collective power that would be very effective in providing them with a sense of common purpose. In addition, training in strategies for gaining and using power effectively could provide students with skills that would provide valuable alternatives to violence and apathy (Wittes, 1970).

Not only have schools failed to develop intergroup understanding, they have failed to promote the development of social responsibility in general. A serious look at the educational system today could well lead to the conclusion that schools are impeding the process of social development. As Sanders (1977) lamented:

> Socialization in our schools (seems) like a socialization by isolation. . . .since one of our thorniest problems today is the isolation of the individuals in our vast institutions, do we want the picture of the child alone to be at all appropriate in a classroom? (p. 53-54).

One of the major problems in the schools is the predominance of competitive and individualistic classrooms. In the competitive classroom, grades are indicators of the student's ranking in the group; for many students the incessant comparison with others on factors that are, for practical purposes like success in the world of work, irrelevant and insignificant, results in a loss of self-esteem and motivation.As Gilbert (1978) cautions:

> tests. . .are usually constructed so that differences among people are arbitrarily emphasized. This is one of the reasons that many tests unfairly discriminate against minority groups in a culture: They magnify really small, significant differences in behavior, and give them excessive weight (p. 24).

The individualistic classroom, a popular trend in recent years, wherein each child is working alone on material selected to meet specific needs, was designed to maximize individual achievement but often results in the sense of isolation criticized by Sanders. In an excellent review of the effect of competitive, cooperative, and individualistic classroom structures on students' development, Johnson and Johnson (1977) presented overwhelming evidence to demonstrate that "almost all instructional activities should take place within a cooperative goal structure" (p. 232). The research these reviewers discuss to support their conclusion is convincing. For example, Bryant (1977) studied the effects of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning environments on subsequent verbal self- and other-enhancement processes of 180 children, aged 8 to 10. From her study, she

concluded that the individualistic learning situations reduced the likelihood of students relating verbally to their peers. Enhancement of self at the expense of others was generalized from the competitive situation, and enhancement of self and other was learned in cooperative settings.

The devastating ramifications of socializing the child into a competitive orientation are revealed in a study by Nelson and Kagan (1972). These researchers noted that middle SES U. S. children became increasingly competitive with age and persisted in competing even in situations in which it was inappropriate and self-defeating. In a review of a number of studies of competition, Nelson and Kagan observed:

> Anglo-American children are not only irrationally competitive, they are almost sadistically rivalrous. Given a choice, Anglo-American children took toys away from their peers on 78% of the trials even when they could not keep the toys for themselves. Observing the success of their actions, some of the children gloated, 'Ha! Ha! Now you won't get a toy.' Rural Mexican children in the same situation were rivalrous only half as often as the Anglo-American child.

The American heritage of "rugged individualism" has received considerable criticism recently, as it has become increasingly obvious that survival in today's complex world is based on the interdependence, not independence, of individuals. Robert Hogan (1975) condemned Americans' obsessive emphasis on the individual's search for identity and attributed many of the current social problems, including alienation, suicide, the rising crime rate, and drug abuse, to the cult of individualism. To counteract these tendencies, Buchen (1974) has called for an educational focus on the relationship and responsibilities between individuals. Classrooms should be organized in ways that require development of skills of cooperation and communication. In today's world, sensitive consideration of one's behavior

and its impact on others is essential in order that the best interests of all can be served. It is critical for our children's survival that educators accept as a major objective the development of students' sense of social responsibility and the interactive skills essential to interdependent living.

In order to develop a sense of social responsibility, the school should provide leadership in identifying and solving community problems. One of the major problems of childhood and growing up in contemporary society is the lack of meaningful roles for children and adolescents. If the schools focused on existing social problems of the community as actual learning experiences, children could obtain valuable practice in group problem-solving and gain a sense of common purpose and responsibility (Van Patten, 1977).

Specification of Goals and Appropriate Evaluation Procedures

Thomas Gilbert (1978) in his study of the nature of human competence identified the most critical need of education for the eighties, that is, the identification of goals to guide educational practice:

> . . . aimlessness (of schools) surely does more to cripple our educational system than all the inefficiencies in teaching that we could point out. . . Nothing is more critical to creating competence than establishing clear, valuable, and measurable goals, and determining the potential for accomplishing them (p. 110, 73).

The need for carefully considered goals that identify the competencies essential for successful coping in the twenty-first century is self-evident. However, serious dangers are inherent in this process.

As noted in the NEA report discussed earlier, education has been seriously limited by narrowly defined objectives and inadequate evaluation instruments. A vivid and unfortunate example of this tendency is the early

assessment of the Head Start compensatory education program. While Head Start was developed to achieve notable advancements in social and personal development, as evidenced by the fact that five of the seven goals for Head Start were related to social and emotional development, the success of the program was initially evaluated in terms of its effect on IQ scores, a particularly inappropriate instrument for the assessment of program effects (Walker, 1973). Similar examples of inappropriate instrumentation can be cited in the Coleman Report and Follow-Through evaluations. Thus, our understanding of schooling effects has been grossly distorted by use of inadequate measurement instruments. Perpetuation of narrowly defined goals and inappropriate evaluation techniques seems particularly likely given the increasing trend toward the development of state mandated competency testing. Educational practices are likely to become even more narrowly focused as teachers become publicly accountable for their students' rankings on tests designed to establish minimal rather than optimal performance standards. Thus, we are in danger of allowing educational goals to be specified in terms of easily measurable, minimal standards rather than in terms of optimal development of all facets of the individual in the context of the social world.

Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum

Declining standards of achievement and permissive classroom structures have often been cited as responsible for the widely publicized drop in test scores on standardized achievement tests. David Elkind, one of the nation's foremost authorities on child development and education, has suggested that the dramatic decline in test scores, notably the SAT, may be due to the fact that the curricula of the 60's and 70's were too difficult

not too easy. It must be remembered that the new curricula in reading, math, science, and social studies of the recent past were created predominantly by specialists, university professors in the academic fields, with relatively little assistance from child development specialists. Consequently, a critical review of the curriculum materials created during this period reveals flagrant violations of the thinking processes and concrete logic of the child. Elkind warns that many school failures and socio-emotional problems in children are due to inappropriate curriculum materials that create frustration and confusion because they conflict with the child's understanding of the world. Thus, an intensive analysis of curriculum materials is needed to insure that they correspond to the developmental level of the child. The expectations that parents and teachers have for children also need to be considered with this perspective. For example, recent efforts to teach children to read and acquire other complex school skills at very early ages are likely to place demands on many children that are inappropriate given the child's developmental level. If children are provided with developmentally appropriate curriculum materials that gradually increase in difficulty and complexity, as the child acquires prerequisite skills, student failure can be reduced to a minimum, and learning can proceed at the most efficient rate possible. Failure of students to acquire the basic tool skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic is a serious indictment of current educational practices, but no less serious is the evidence suggesting that current school practices inhibit the development of creative thinking processes (Torrance, 1963), logical thinking abilities (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971) and social skills (Nelson & Kagan, 1972).

To emphasize development of "basic skills" without a balanced concern for social-emotional and higher cognitive processes is likely to result in

failure, for students are unlikely to appreciate the importance of these skills when they are taught in a context that ignores the emotional, cognitive, and social needs of the child.

Effective Teacher-Student Relationships

Problems of student motivation are prevalent at both the elementary and secondary level. Teachers must recognize that the teacher-student relationship is the source of many learning problems. Elkind has alerted us to the importance of the relationship as a motivational factor:

> "Too often the academic failure of students is attributed to personal qualities such as low intelligence or "laziness" when in fact the problem lies in the relationship between pupil and teacher or child and parents...In fact, however, the culprit is more often a real or imagined breach in the implicit contractual arrangements between teacher and child."(p. 117)

Teacher education programs must emphaize the characteristics of an effective teacher-student relationship and provide teachers with the skills essential for establishing and maintaining effective rapport with students.

Contributions of Educational Research to Educational Practice in the Eighties

The results of educational research have had a rather limited role in the improvement of educational practice. However, recent breakthroughs in research suggest that in the eighties significant advances in educational practices will be possible, if adequate procedures are designed to facilitate dissemination of current research findings, and funding is continued for educational research that focuses on the solution of immediate problems in the school context. A number of recent studies have attempted to explore the effect of varying teacher behavior in the classroom and have found that significant effects on student achievement are possible using this approach. For example, applying Glass and Smith's (1978) finding that significant achievement gains accrue when class size is reduced to 15 or below, Cahen and Filby (1979) are studying the effect of reducing class size and

experimenting with ways of working effectively with small groups. Anderson, Evertson, and Brophy (1979), Good and Grouws (1978), and Gage (1978) reported substantial success in increasing student achievement through training teachers to use specific techniques.

The Follow-Through evaluations revealed that teacher effects vary for different student outcomes; for example, a high rate of drill, practice and praise resulted in significant gains in reading and math test scores for low SES children in grades one and three, while opportunities for child - selected activities and considerable self-direction resulted in evidence of greater independence, cooperation, curiosity, problem-solving ability, and increased school attendance (Stallings, 1977). Thus, teachers need to be trained to use a variety of techniques, depending on the specific outcomes intended.

The Professional Education of Teachers

The research results discussed in the previous section suggest that there is a rapidly increasing literature that could provide teachers with the skills and knowledge essential to motivating student achievement. Current teacher education programs, however, are unable to provide the expertise and sophistication a teacher needs to succeed in the classroom in the two years that traditionally comprise the teacher education program. An extensive revision of teacher education programs that would provide a professional education program comparable to the professional training of lawyers and doctors is desperately needed if teachers are to meet the challenge of preparing students to cope in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Abraham Maslow (1962) proposed an approach to motivation that has tremendous implications for understanding the reasons underlying the majority

of school failures. According to Maslow, basic survival needs must be met before educators can motivate children to develop interest in academic subject matter. Children who are hungry, poorly sheltered, frightened, and unloved are poor candidates for school learning. Therefore, those of us concerned about promoting children's academic achievement must first be concerned about insuring all children the right to adequate food, shelter, security, and love. When these elemental needs have been met, students are then free to respond to their need to know and understand. The violence and apathy characterizing student attitudes in the seventies are, in large part, attributable to the schools' failure to give children opportunities to develop a sense of purpose and social responsibility. When students fail to see a relationship between their interests and needs and the demands of school life , frustration and violence or apathy are likely to follow. When learning experiences are relevant to children's interests and provide them with the opportunity to achieve a new skill or contribute to a meaningful goal, motivation is inherent in the activity itself and teachers are freed from the need to provide external incentives for learning. If schools can respond to children's needs to belong, to be appreciated and valued, to acquire meaningful skills, to contribute to important human endeavors--then the eighties will be a decade of significant educational progress. Major efforts needed to achieve these goals include (1) school programs aimed at the development of social responsibility, (2) specifications of long-term educational goals and development of appropriate instruments for evaluation of goal attainment, (3) curriculum materials that are developmentally appropriate, (4) development of effective teacher-student relationships, (5) research aimed at solving school problems, and (6) professional education of teachers.

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